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ABSTRACT

Two basic questions about Catholic schools are addressed: (1) what is the current status of Catholic schooling in the United States? and (2) what does an analysis of recent trends suggest about the prospects for Catholic schools in the future? Recent research about Catholic schools can be divided into three categories. The first category is descriptive and answers questions concerning the role of Catholic schooling in the United States. The second addresses the effectiveness or the outcomes of schooling, and the third examines why Catholic schools are effective and how they operate. The future prospects of Catholic schools in the United States will be shaped by the degree to which the schools and their supporters respond to the basic challenges of finance and staffing. Additionally, the Catholic education community needs to find ways to balance the freedom and autonomy of the local schools with a commitment to collaboration and mutual support among the schools and communities they serve. However, the ultimate challenge that Catholic schools must address is their position within the Catholic community as a whole. A crisis of commitment has affected the schools to the extent that some now regard them as an endangered species. The answer is linked to the challenge within the Catholic community to provide the kind of vision and leadership that transcends institutional and regional boundaries. (KM)

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Lighting New Fires: Catholic Schooling in America 25 Years After Vatican II

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Lighting New Fires: Catholic Schooling in America 25 Years After Vatican II

By Michael J. Guerra

National
Catholic
Educational
Association

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Background

This paper was originally prepared for presentation at a symposium on Vatican II and the Post-Conciliar Church sponsored by Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union, the Catholic University of America, Fordham University and Georgetown University, in Washington in September 1990. I accepted the invitation to prepare the paper because I believed that a scholarly review of the American Catholic experience in the twenty-five years since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council would be incomplete without an examination of the role of Catholic schools in shaping the present and future Church. I am indebted to James Heft, SM, provost of the University of Dayton, whose intervention led to the invitation that occasioned this paper. I am also indebted to Sister Rita Carey, SNJM, Sister Mary Burke, SNJM and Ms. Denise Eggers. Without their editorial and managerial ministrations, this manuscript would have remained buried in the archives until I mended my peripatetic ways.

The National Catholic Educational Association's Secondary School Department decided to publish this monograph as a contribution to the national dialogue about the future of Catholic schools. It is my hope that this dialogue, like the paper, will begin with a careful consideration of the research. But it is also my hope that the national discussion will go beyond dispassionate analysis of the research to build a new and passionate commitment to the future of Catholic schooling in the United States. While I cannot claim to be able to explain all the mysterious connections (and gaps) between understanding and commitment, a dim recollection of some youthful rummaging in Aquinas's attic urges me on. And for some of us marginal metaphysicians, the belief that what one learns may be related to how one lives explains in large part why we became committed to Catholic education in the first place.

I was encouraged by the recent discovery of John Breslin's fine anthology, ***The Substance of Things Hoped For;*** the title serves as the unifying principle for a collection of

very different pieces of short fiction by a variety of modern Catholic authors. Breslin's book reminds me that hope is the key to understanding our common story, and hope is the key to the future of our schools.

Michael J. Guerra
Washington, DC
December 8, 1990

There are two basic questions to ask about Catholic schools.

What is the current status of Catholic schooling in the United States?

What does an analysis of recent trends suggest about the prospects for Catholic schools in the future?

The first of these questions can be answered by a reasonably straightforward summary of the research, while the second involves some speculation based on certain assumptions about the ecclesial and social context.

Speculation is inevitably more interesting, both to the speculator and the reader, but it is important to use the research base as a point of departure, so that the speculation is at least rooted in the soil of documentation, however ethereal its reach. And so let us dig in the dirt first.

I. The Current Status

Recent research on Catholic schools can be divided Gaul-like into three parts, dealing with three related but reasonably discrete domains, or sets of questions.

The ***first*** set of questions is descriptive. What is the role of Catholic schooling in America? Whom does it serve, directly and indirectly? What are its resources and demographic characteristics?

The answers to these questions require relatively little digging. The survey research done by the National Catholic Educational Association and the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics is not very controversial, but it offers an essential starting point for any effort to describe the context accurately, and a basis for putting some persistent myths and stereotypes to rest.

The ***second*** set of questions addresses effectiveness, or the outcomes of schooling. How effective are Catholic schools? What measures help us to judge the success of Catholic schools as academic institutions? What measures can we use to judge their effectiveness as Catholic institutions?

These are important and difficult questions, and the answers require more energetic digging. There are answers to be found in the research, and while there are debates about methodologies and about the public policy implications of this research, the literature describes some fairly clear trends and some large areas of agreement about the effectiveness of Catholic schools.

The ***third*** set of questions is the most elusive, and the answers suggested by research are cautious, tentative

and modest. This is a search for rare and precious insights, but some light and some wisdom is offered by James Coleman and a few others who have been willing to ask the most basic of questions, WHY and HOW? Why are Catholic schools effective? How do they work? How do they manage to make a difference in the lives of students? What are the sources of their power?

A. A Portrait...by the Numbers

Let's begin by setting the stage. What is the role of Catholic schooling in the United States today? Whom does it serve? How has it changed since the close of the Second Vatican Council?

At its peak in 1965, 10,879 Catholic elementary schools served 4.5 million students, and 2,413 Catholic secondary schools served 1.1 million students. In 1990, 25 years after Vatican II, 7,395 Catholic elementary schools are serving 2.0 million students, and 1,324 Catholic secondary schools serve 606,000 students.[1]

Exhibit 1: Student Enrollment: Catholic School Population Compared to Private/ Total U.S. School Population

Catholic	2.6 million
Private	5.2 million
Total U.S. Students	45 million

Lighting New Fires: Catholic Schooling in America 25 Years After Vatican II, National Catholic Educational Association 1991

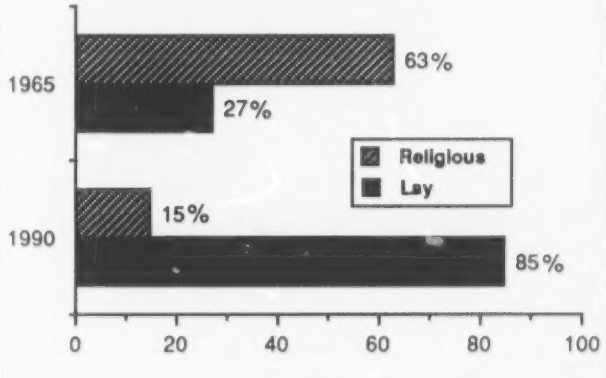
With current enrollments at 2.6 million students, Catholic school students represent about half of the private school population of 5.2 million, and about 6% of the total U.S. school population of 45 million.

Pre-school and kindergarten programs have grown substantially in recent years, while upper-grade elementary and secondary school enrollments declined. In part, this trend reflects shifts in the age distribution of the national population, a decline in birth rates, and changes in the

geographic distribution of the American Catholic population.

In the last 25 years, the teaching staff has moved from predominantly religious to predominantly lay. In 1965 about 63% of the teaching staff was religious. Lay teachers now represent about 85% of the faculties, sisters 12% and priests and brothers 3%. An increasing number of principals are laypersons; one third of the Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States now have lay principals.

Exhibit 2: 1965-1990 Shift in Teaching Staff (Percentage Lay Teachers/Religious Teachers)



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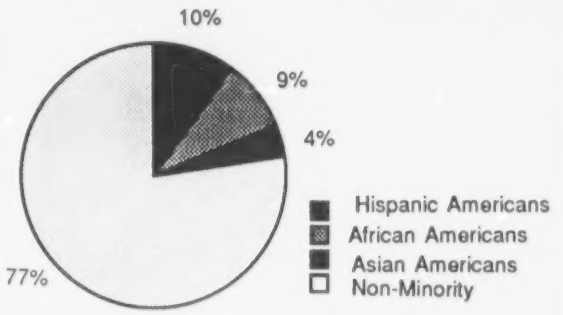
Minority enrollment has increased from 11% in 1970 to 23% in 1989. Of that 23%, 10% are Hispanic Americans, 9% are African Americans, 4% are Asian Americans. While 97% of the Hispanic students are Catholic, about two-thirds of the black students in Catholic schools are non-Catholics. The percentage of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools has grown slowly in recent years, and stood at 12.5% in 1990.

Exhibit 3: Minority Enrollment in Catholic Schools



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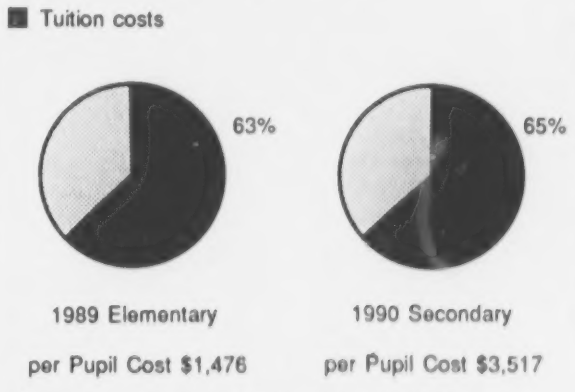
Catholics spend over $5 billion dollars a year supporting Catholic elementary and secondary schools. The average elementary school tuition in 1989 was $925, and it covered 63% of the average per pupil cost of $1,476.[2] Parish support varied widely in the most recent survey. In an earlier study,[3] parish support provided 40% of per pupil costs while tuition covered 45%. Given the increase in the percent of costs covered by tuitions, it is reasonable to infer that the average parish subsidy has been reduced to about 20% of elementary school income, with the balance provided by local fundraising and other income producing activities.

The average secondary school tuition in 1990 was $2,300, and covered 65% of the average per pupil cost of $3,517.[4] Fundraising and other income producing activities contribute 17%, while subsidies and other contributed services provide 13% of an average high school's total income. In 1988 the average high school tuition covered 70% of per pupil costs. It is interesting to observe the convergence of trends in the percent of costs covered by elementary and secondary school tuitions, a percent that is growing in elementary schools as parish support is reduced, and shrinking in secondary schools as more sophisticated development efforts generate increased non-tuition revenue.

Exhibit 4: Elementary & Secondary Tuition Costs as % of per Pupil Cost



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The Catholic community's expenditure of $5 billion in tuitions and contributions generates even larger savings for the civic community. Since Catholic schools operate on average at less than half the per pupil costs of public education, which was estimated by the U.S. Department of Education at $4,719 last year,[5] Catholic schools represent a savings to U.S. taxpayers of more than 10 billion dollars a year. Everett Dirkson once said, "A billion here and a billion there, pretty soon you're talking about real money." So even by Washington's somewhat cavalier fiscal standards, when we measure the financial contribution of Catholic schooling to the educational effort in the United States, we are talking about real money. And dollars fail to measure the contributions of the time and talent and lives of under-compensated religious and lay teachers and uncompensated volunteers, usually parents. Whatever the measures, Catholic schools are certainly a great gift to the nation.

There is one persistent stereotype that is often raised in debates about the apparent effectiveness of Catholic schools; it needs to be addressed before we abandon the descriptive data. How selective are Catholic schools? Do they choose only the docile, the affluent, the students from

strong, committed families? In fact, most Catholic schools accept all applicants. Catholic elementary schools typically accept most applicants, although many have a separate fee schedule for children of non-parishioners. A relatively small number of Catholic high schools are somewhat selective, and report rigorous academic criteria for admissions, and waiting lists, but the average Catholic high school accepted 98% of all applicants in the fall of 1989, and about one-third report a fully open admissions policy, accepting all applicants. Nor is there a kind of reverse selectivity at work. The retention rates are extremely high for all students, including minority and low-income students, whose dropout rates in Catholic schools are one-fourth of what they are in public schools. And that brings us to the second issue.

B. Outcomes

The effectiveness of Catholic schools is a complex issue and deserves attention. A fair reading of the research acknowledges that Catholic schools do not hold a monopoly on academic excellence. By any reasonable standards, there are some very effective public schools, and some very effective non-Catholic private schools, many of which have been selected for national recognition, along with an impressive number of Catholic elementary and secondary schools. Nor does the research suggest that each Catholic school has reached a level of excellence that precludes any need for improvement. But when researchers such as James Coleman, Andrew Greeley, Anthony Bryk, Peter Benson and Valerie Lee study groups of schools, it becomes clear from their published works that Catholic schools, as a group, produce much stronger academic outcomes than public schools.

These studies report remarkably consistent and startling results. The academic success of Catholic schools is well documented for all students, but it is especially pronounced for minority students and those from low-income families. The evidence is especially strong at the high school level, simply because there has been far greater research interest in secondary education, and because there are several extraordinary data sets available for analysis, namely the *High School and Beyond* data, which provided the basis for studies of academic achievement by James Coleman

and others, and the University of Michigan's *Monitoring the Future*, which provided the basis for the most recent study of Catholic school impact on student values.

Coleman and his colleagues have produced two major studies. His first study in 1982[6] compared academic achievement in public, Catholic and other private schools, and found Catholic schools produced significantly higher achievement than public schools with students of comparable backgrounds. Coleman discovered and defined a "Catholic School Effect," i.e., a school influence that was distinct from socioeconomic status, family, race, and ethnicity. His 1987 study[7] tends to confirm and strengthen his 1982 analysis, which had generated a rather emotional response from ordinarily dispassionate researchers. His later work goes beyond confirming the success of Catholic high schools in raising academic achievement. In an especially significant analysis of the probabilities of dropping out between the spring of sophomore year and the spring of senior year, Coleman and Hoffer report the following variations:[8]

Exhibit 5: Percentage Dropping Out

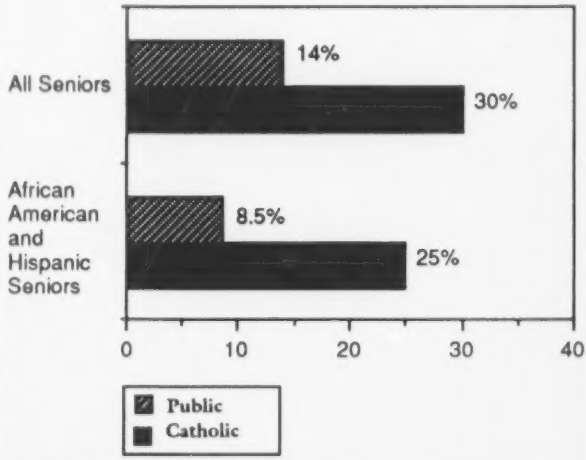
Public Schools	**14.4%**
Catholic Schools	**3.4%**
Other Private Schools	**11.9%**

Lighting New Fires: Catholic Schooling in America 25 Years After Vatican II, National Catholic Educational Association 1991

As Coleman points out, these percentages probably understate the extent of the dropout problem, because they do not include students who may have left school before the spring of sophomore year. Possibly, the public-Catholic retention gap is even wider, but the point is that students in Catholic schools are far more likely to matriculate to college and those who go on to college are more likely to graduate. Further, those who drop out of college are more

likely to return. For example, by the spring of 1986, 14% of the 1980 public high school seniors had earned a B.A., B.S. or M.A. degree, while 30% of the 1980 Catholic high school seniors had earned degrees. African American and Hispanic graduates of Catholic high schools were three times more likely to have earned a degree (25% vs. 8.5%) than African American and Hispanic graduates of public high schools.[9]

Exhibit 6: 1980 High School Seniors Earning College Degrees (BA/BS or MA/MS) by 1986



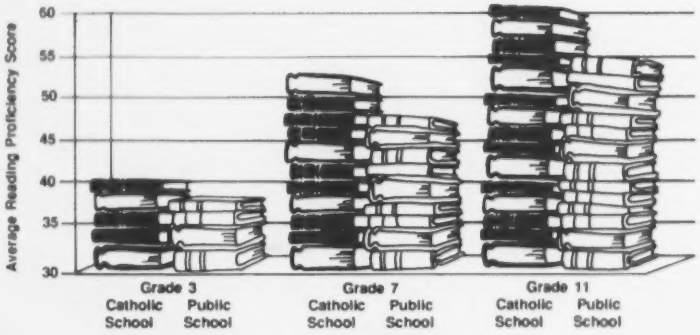
Lighting New Fires: Catholic Schooling in America 25 Years After Vatican II, National Catholic Educational Association 1991

However broad and comprehensive the definition of academic success, Catholic high schools produce results that surpass the results achieved ***with students from comparable backgrounds*** in either public or other private schools.

While there is more evidence available describing effective secondary schools, there are two important analyses of the National Assessment of Educational Progress that offer some indication of the relative success of Catholic elementary schools in ***reading***, arguably the most basic of educational outcomes, and in mathematics and science.

Exhibit 7: Reading Scores

Reading Proficiency Scores:
Catholic and Public Schools Compared



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress Proficiency in Reading: 1985-1986 Catholic and Public Schools Compared Final Report 1989. NCEA

An analysis of national reading scores at the 3th, 7th and 11th grade levels done by Valerie Lee in 1985[10] revealed that, on average, Catholic school students lead the nation at every grade level. When the data are broken out into every possible subgroup measured by the assessment, i.e.,by sex, by race/ethnicity, by region of the country and by parental education, Catholic school students continue to exceed national averages, suggesting again that Catholic schools make a difference for ***all*** students, regardless of background.

A subsequent analysis of math and science scores produced remarkably similar results.[11] Some had suggested that the earlier report of advantages in reading may have been a reflection of a parental commitment to education that leads not only to the choice of a non-public school but also to an early family endorsement of books and reading. But math and science are generally considered "school subjects," and Catholic schools are thought less likely to provide the laboratories, computers and differentiated salaries available in many public school districts. Nevertheless, the average math and science scores of Catholic school students exceeded national averages at every grade level tested.

Exhibit 8: Math Scores

Comparison of Math Scores of Catholic and Public School Students

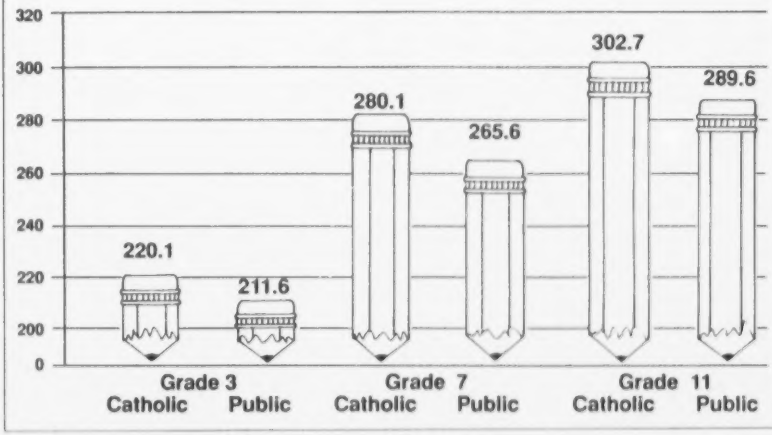
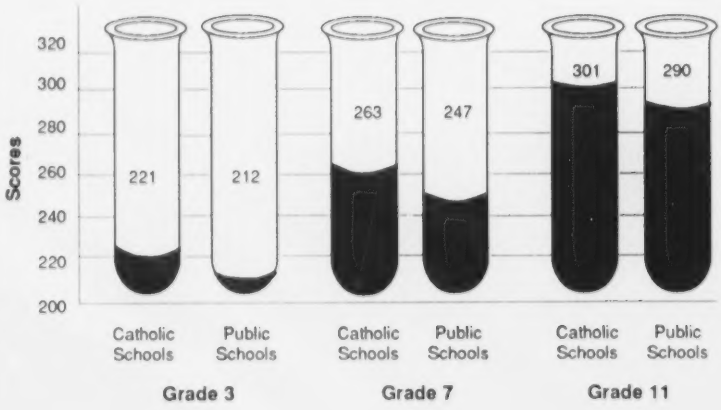


Exhibit 9: Science Scores

Comparison of Science Scores of Catholic and Public School Students



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress Proficiency in Mathematics and Science: 1985 - 86, NCEA, 1989.

For supporters of Catholic schools the evidence for their academic effectiveness is encouraging, but not fully satisfying. Catholic schools define effectiveness to incorporate academic excellence within a larger set of goals for schooling. Catholics want their schools to be effective in touching the hearts of students, they want their schools to teach as Jesus taught, and they expect their schools to be visibly and vibrantly Catholic, transmitting the content of the faith, building community, and encouraging a generous disposition to service.

Since these are fundamental and essential goals for Catholic schools, we must ask, how effective are Catholic schools in meeting these goals?

Although Catholics are certainly not alone in their concern for values, fewer researchers seem interested in these questions. While many of their colleagues in private education and an increasing number in public education are concerned with values, many public educators are restrained by their concerns about the possibility of being drawn into an explicit consideration of religious beliefs that form the basis for shared social values; their interest in dialogue is tentative, and consequently the research base is modest.

Nevertheless, some important studies offer useful evidence about Catholic school influence in shaping student values and religious behavior. Andrew Greeley has completed a number of studies of American Catholics and has found consistently positive correlations between attendance at Catholic school and religious behavior. After controlling for family background and the influence of a spouse, both of which powerfully affect religious beliefs and behavior, Greeley found statistically significant relationships between eight or more years of Catholic schooling and attendance at Sunday Mass, activity in the parish, belief in life after death and opposition to abortion.[12] It is important to note that Greeley's work does not deny that family influence is important in shaping religious beliefs and practices, but his analysis suggests that, statistically, Catholic school influence is at least as strong as family influence. The most positive results are found when school and family influences are both strong and mutually supportive. In an important study of young Catholic adults in the U.S. and Canada, Greeley discovered that Catholic schools had a statistically powerful and positive relationship to the return rates of young

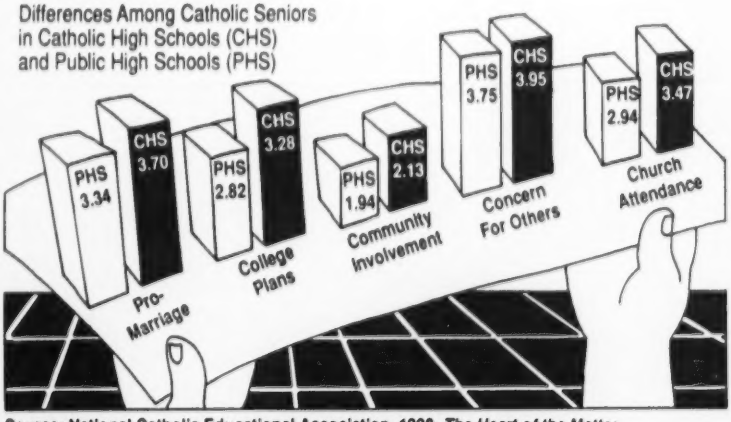
Catholics who drift away from the Church in their late teens and early twenties and consider returning in their late twenties as they begin to form families.[13]

In an analysis of the responses of Catholic students in both public and Catholic high schools to a small number of questions about religion in the HSB survey, John Convey found Catholic school students were more likely to attend Sunday Mass; they reported "a [stronger] family orientation; they valued children and friendships more, and they were less interested in having lots of money than were Catholic students who did not attend Catholic schools." [14]

A recent NCEA study[15] examines data collected from 12th graders by the University of Michigan over the past dozen years. This study tends to confirm and extend Convey's findings. *The Heart of the Matter* compares the values and behaviors of Catholic students in public schools with Catholic students in Catholic schools in six major areas, namely social values, educational values, concern for people, risk behaviors, perspectives on self, and faith and church.

Within each of these areas there are some dimensions in which there are few differences, and some dimensions in which there are significant differences. In virtually every instance the differences suggest a positive Catholic school

Exhibit 10



Source: National Catholic Educational Association, 1990. *The Heart of the Matter.*
Note: Scales range from 1-4 to 1-5. Higher averages indicate stronger levels of support.

influence on values and behavior. Catholic high school seniors are more likely to express support for marriage and family values, for community involvement and concern for others, for commitment to church and the importance of religion. Catholic high school seniors are less likely to endorse militarism, and report less class cutting and lower levels of cigarette, cocaine and other illicit drug use.

To be fair, each of these studies is carefully encased in caveats. In 1980 Andrew Greeley offered what was then and probably still is the best summary of the research on the religious effectiveness of Catholic schools and the balance to be struck between caution and conviction:

> Any serious perusal of the educational impact literature would reveal that schools should not reasonably be expected to undo the work of home, family, peer group, neighborhood, social class and ethnic culture. Though schools can make a difference under some circumstances, the boundless American faith in the power of formal education has never been sustained either by empirical evidence or by everyday impression. Where does this leave us on the subject of the effectiveness of Catholic schools?
>
> They don't produce graduates who are universally exemplary Catholics. They do have a significant effect. How much effect? Far more effect in terms of statistical size than is ordinarily found in sociological studies of human behavior.[16]

It is not a simple matter to measure changes in beliefs and values and behaviors, or to link those changes to the work of the schools, but all the available evidence is positive.

And so, finally, we reach the third set of questions—difficult, complex, but inevitable and intriguing.

C. Explanations

Why are Catholic schools effective?

How do they work?

What is the source of their power?

Here there is a substantial body of conventional wisdom about effective schools, frequently referred to by

educators as the "effective schools literature," which seems to fit what we know about Catholic schools and can help to explain some of the extraordinary success of most Catholic schools. The characteristics of all effective schools are in fact qualities that are found in many—I would suggest most—Catholic schools. What are these characteristics? Academically effective schools usually include four critical ingredients:

* *Agreement about the school's purpose* that is broadly shared by administrators, teachers, parents and students.

* *Strong leadership*—competent, committed, articulate principals, who have a vision of what a school is and what it can be.

* *A positive school climate*—high academic expectations, a strong academic curriculum and regularly assigned homework, good discipline which is perceived by students to be fair as well as firm.

* *Teachers who are both caring and demanding*, who believe all students can succeed, and each student is important, and who are willing to intrude in order to make a difference in the lives of students. Are there teachers like this in Catholic schools? Has the shift from a predominantly religious to a predominantly lay staff changed the nature and quality of teacher commitment? An NCEA field research team drew conclusions regarding teachers after they spent time in five very different Catholic schools. The principal researcher, Dr. Patricia Bauch, currently an associate professor at the University of Alabama, had worked with John Goodlad on his study of schools. An exceptionally careful and competent field researcher, and a trained observer, Dr. Bauch reports:

> The best, most loved teachers demonstrate their caring by being willing to be intrusive about students' home lives, their behavior outside school, the progress of their friendships. To a degree that might be seen in other settings as aggressively and inappropriately intrusive, teachers keep in touch with what is going on with their students. They don't "mind their own business." And the interest expressed may not only be intrusive but negative: "Do I hear you messed up last weekend? What was that all

about?" But when these examples of interest are mentioned by either parents or students, it is usually in a positive light. Students know they are persons. They are known by someone who matters. They are cared about.[17]

Teachers are the heart and soul of all effective schools. Schools need teachers who see their work as something more than a job, and Catholic schools apparently are blessed with an extraordinary number of such teachers. Dr. Peter Benson's description of Catholic school teachers, drawn from a review of NCEA's research on teachers' attitudes and values, confirms their unique contributions to Catholic school effectiveness:

> In most lines of work, salary satisfaction and job satisfaction go hand-in-hand. It is only when we understand the motivations of Catholic teachers that we can see what is going on. The top three motivations for Catholic school teachers are: a desire to teach in a quality educational environment, the love of teaching, and the view that teaching is an important kind of ministry. Salary and benefits rank at the very bottom of motivations. So we are blessed with dedicated teachers. Somehow, we find a way to bring committed people into our schools. What we cannot easily solve, though, is the problem of turnover, and an infusion of new dollars to upgrade salaries is one important way to help.
>
> Our research has shown us time and time again that Catholic school teachers are a special group of people. The book *Sharing the Faith: The Beliefs and Values of Catholic High School Teachers* documents the strong educational and religious commitments of teachers, their concern for educating the whole person, their devotion to the Catholic school mission, their willingness to do all that is necessary to make schools work.[18]

An interesting study from the Brookings Institution pushes the conventional wisdom a little further. John

Chubb and Terry Moe compare the organizational arrangements of Catholic and public schools as well as the perceptions of teachers and principals about their schools. Much of the evidence they offer supports the conventional wisdom about the importance of strong leadership and broad agreement about the school's purpose. Their observations about leadership...

> Private school principals have greater freedom to pursue the roles of leader and trustee, and to direct their schools according to their best professional judgments.[19]

Their observations about teachers...

> Teachers in all three types of private schools say that the goals of their schools are clearer and more clearly communicated by the principal than teachers in public schools report. In addition, private school teachers are more in agreement among themselves about these matters. Students experience it, for example, in dealing with school disciplinary policies. From the perspective of students, disciplinary policies are more ambiguous in public schools than in private: public school students are less likely to know what comprises school policy than private school students. In light of this difference, it is not surprising to find that public school students regard their policies as less fair and effective.[20]

But their key assertion is that private schools in general, and Catholic schools in particular, allow substantial *freedom* for principals and teachers at the school level to exercise leadership and creativity, and principals and teachers respond in extraordinary ways to use that freedom to build schools in which each student's success is important:

> ...for despite the reputations that private schools have for rigid curricula, traditional instructional methods, strong principals, and in general, centralization, the opinions of the staff suggest nothing of the kind. Private schools consistently

> manifest fewer of the consequences of hierarchy than public schools. The teachers in private schools are significantly more likely than those in public schools to regard their principals as encouraging, supportive, and reinforcing. They feel more influential over school-wide policies governing student behavior, teacher in-service programs, the grouping of students of differing abilities, and school curriculum. Within their classrooms, private teachers believe they have more control over text selection, course content, teaching techniques, disciplining students, and in the Catholic schools determining the amount of homework to be assigned.[21]

Along with effectiveness, decentralization offers an important element in Catholic school efficiency. In a typical diocesan education department, the central office staff is small—minuscule in comparison to their opposite numbers in the typical public school district office—and generally committed to service rather than control. David Kearns, CEO of Xerox, offered similar advice to public school educators:

> Make central administration a service center. Go ahead and allocate funds, but the principal and staff will be responsible for spending them. That will streamline middle management, I assure you, and it will put resources where they belong, in the school building. Hiring and firing should be done at the building level, as well. When principals and teachers participate in the selection process in their own schools, you can be certain of one thing: Quality and performance will improve.[22]

That is generally the way Catholic schools function, and the Brookings study suggests that it helps to explain why they are successful. What is offered as radical reform in the public sector is the standard operational style for Catholic education. But the most interesting and, in my judgment, the most fundamental explanation for Catholic school effectiveness is found in Coleman and Hoffer's most

recent book, titled *Public and Private High Schools* and subtitled *The Impact of Communities.*

This extraordinary study goes well beyond their earlier review of academic achievement in high school to look at dropouts, college placement, employment and earnings.

While Catholic schools earn good grades in virtually every category, their relative advantage in preventing dropouts is truly amazing. Coleman also goes well beyond the usual explanations—clear goals, high academic expectations, regular homework—to suggest a much more fundamental reason for the effectiveness of Catholic schools. Those who are committed to Catholic schools have always believed that these schools are deeply rooted in the Catholic community. *They believe the Catholic school draws life and gives life to the whole Church.* In this new study, Coleman the sociologist comes tantalizingly close to theological terrain, which is apparently a shared interest among Chicago-based sociologists. When the ink is dry, he offers new and independent evidence that the Catholic school, as a community of faith, may generate a contagious and unique power. Drawing on this power, he points out that the school is *most* effective for Catholic students who are actively involved in their Church, suggesting that there is more than rhetoric to recommend partnerships that include pastors, parents and principals. But he goes on to point out that the Catholic school is generally more effective than public or non-sectarian private schools for virtually *all students,* including non-Catholics. And perhaps its most significant successes involve those students who experience little support at home. The children of Coleman's "deficient families" (some would call them "at risk" students) have the greatest need, and they draw substantial strength from the contagious power of the Catholic school community.

In sum, the body of research about Catholic schooling is impressive, encouraging, and unfailingly positive. It is important to remember that, with the exception of the work of Andrew Greeley (who for the longest time was virtually the only social scientist doing serious, systematic research on Catholic schools) and the recent work published by the National Catholic Educational Association, most of the studies cited here were conducted by social scientists who happen to be non-Catholics, and whose scholarly work is quite independent of the Church and Catholic schools.

(This is not to suggest that Andrew Greeley's work has been dependent on or sponsored by the Church. In this area, not surprisingly, Fr. Greeley has operated with his customary independence.)

2. *Future Prospects*

Although the evidence for the effectiveness of Catholic schools is very powerful, the prospects for the future are far from certain. In my judgment the future of Catholic schools in the United States will be shaped by the degree to which the schools and their supporters respond to three basic challenges.

A. Finance

Most observers regard financing the schools as the first and most obvious challenge, but the finance issue is itself a mix of several interrelated challenges, namely affordability and access for families, and justice for teachers.

How can Catholic schools remain available to all families, including those with low and moderate incomes? Tuitions are climbing, the number of teaching religious is shrinking, some deferred maintenance bills are coming due.

Commitments to families must be balanced with commitments to faculties—predominantly lay faculties need fair compensation, a reasonable salary and appropriate benefits. The compensation issue is not limited to lay teachers; religious need fair compensation, not only to meet their present material needs, but also to assist in meeting the largely underfunded retirement and medical needs of older religious, the people who built and staffed most of our schools, and who served for many years as the schools' true endowment. Schools must accept some share of the debt the Catholic community owes to its religious.

The evidence indicates that Catholic schools are working to meet these needs. The most recent NCEA study of Catholic high schools[23] reports increases in lay salaries of 30% over the past four years (1986-1990), and increases in the compensation of women religious of 50% during the same four-year period. The median salary for a lay teacher in a Catholic high school was $22,000 in 1990, and the median annual compensation for a religious was $17,800.

An NCEA report of elementary school finances in 1989[24] put the average teacher's salary at $15,600.

In recent years there has been general agreement that faculty compensation must be a priority, and there has been relatively substantial improvement, but by any reasonable standards there is still a long way to go. On average Catholic school teachers earn about two thirds the salary of their public school counterparts, and some of the most recent public school teacher contracts will push that gap even wider.

While tuitions have increased, so have financial aid programs. Four years ago, 10% of all Catholic high school students received financial aid, and the average grant was about $500. Last year 17% of all Catholic high school students received financial aid, and the average grant was $880, a figure that represented about 35% of the average tuition in 1990.

The evidence suggests that Catholic schools are making a conscientious and substantial effort to resolve the basic financial dilemma—fairness for families and faculties. The question, however, remains: can Catholic schools contain tuition increases sufficiently to avoid evolving into a loose network of independent schools serving an increasingly and

Exhibit 11

Growth in Financial Aid in Catholic High Schools

	1986	1988	1990
Average financial aid grant	$500	$709	$880
% of tuition covered	30%	37%	38%

	1986	1988	1990
Percentage of students receiving aid	10%	16%	17%

Sources: *Catholic High Schools and Their Finances, 1990*; *Catholic High Schools and Their Finances, 1988*, published by NCEA.

ultimately an exclusively upper middle class clientele? This is not where Catholic schools are today, nor is it what most Catholic schools were intended to be, but this scenario seems inevitable if the future is determined largely by economic forces driving the decisions of autonomous institutions. Some Catholic schools have mounted increasingly professional development efforts to broaden their support base, but many of them, especially the most fragile, have difficulty generating the start-up capital or the human resources to get broad-based development programs started.

B. Staffing

The second major challenge facing Catholic schools is staffing. Staffing, of course, is related to compensation, but it involves much more than compensation.

As Peter Benson pointed out in his summary of the research on teachers' values, Catholic school teachers, lay and religious, are committed and dedicated. They are the heart and soul of Catholic schools, and the source of much of the schools' successes.

But many of them leave within five years, probably because of inadequate salaries. While schools have been generally successful in recruiting replacements, they face two problems in the future.

As the number of teaching sisters, brothers and priests declines, the average age of schools faculties will continue to drop. The current balance between the older and wiser teachers, many of them religious, and the younger, enthusiastic teachers, most of them lay, will shift. In 1985, the average age of lay teachers was 35, the average age of teaching religious was 55. When these numbers are collected again, I am confident that the second number will be larger, and the age gap will have widened.

What is at risk is not simply a sense of balance, but the faculty's sense of trusteeship, their understanding of and ultimately their ability to make a commitment to the school's history and its purpose.

The study of teachers' beliefs and values confirms the fact that lay teachers are open to an understanding of teaching as ministry, but their capacity to provide a mature and explicit Catholic witness needs to be nurtured and encouraged. Many of them come from secular colleges, and

their good will and commitment needs to be strengthened not only with formal in-service programs, but with the friendship and colleagueship of senior teachers. To provide continuing spiritual growth, to encourage acceptance of the school's religious mission as a shared responsibility and a corporate apostolate, Catholic schools must provide for some stability in their faculties. They have to be able to retain many of their most promising young teachers, to offer them realistic opportunities to remain in Catholic schools for more than the first few years of their professional careers. And they have to be alert to possibilities for attracting teachers from among those who are interested in service and in second careers. Schools need material resources, but they also need imagination and creativity.

It is generally agreed that the leadership role of the principal is critically important to any school's success. Increasing numbers of Catholic school principals are laypersons—good people, thoroughly professional, committed to Catholic education. But they don't come fully formed from seminaries or religious formation programs. They need support and encouragement. Like the teachers in Catholic schools, they too earn far less than their public school counterparts, and schools need to be attentive to the compensation question. But Catholic school principals especially need encouragement. Unlike their public school counterparts, they have a wider variety of leadership responsibilities, including instructional leadership, managerial leadership and ***spiritual leadership***. In practice extraordinary things are expected from Catholic school principals, and given the schools' documented record of academic and religious effectiveness, it is clear that Catholic school principals provide very effective leadership in each of these areas. But their average tenure is about five years. Catholic schools need to extend that tenure, and the Catholic educational community needs to mount a concerted effort to identify, encourage and train some of their talented lay teachers and others to form the next generation of principals.

C. The Problem of the One and the Many

Finally, and most importantly, the Catholic educational community needs to find ways to balance the freedom and autonomy of the local schools, which Chubb and others suggest is the source of much of the schools' success, with a commitment to collaboration and mutual support among the schools and the communities they serve. The leaders and supporters of Catholic schools need to appreciate the distinctive gifts and unique contributions of different schools and different communities, but they also need to come together, to help one another, and to find ways to share their many gifts. Catholic schools should not become and probably could never be a tightly centralized system. They can, however, draw together like a family, strengthening each other by sharing the spirit that is always with them. They need to recognize, as James Coleman points out, that much of their strength comes from their roots in the Catholic community. While *family* provides a powerful metaphor for Catholic schools, these are hardly the best of times for families, and the climate is much less conducive to collaboration than it is to the pursuit of personal and institutional self-interest. But if many Catholic educators have a particularly strong commitment to a specific institution, very few seem motivated by a personal self-interest. Given their capacity for generosity, I would expect them to respond to an audible and credible call for mutual support and collaboration.

3. A Final Question

These are the challenges that Catholic schools must address in the near future, but the ultimate challenge is addressed not to the schools and their supporters, but to the Catholic community at large.

The unique contribution of Catholic schools to the educational ministry of the Church has never lacked strong rhetorical support:

> Of the educational programs available to the Catholic community, Catholic schools afford the fullest and best opportunity to realize the

threefold purpose of Christian education among children and young people. Schools naturally enjoy educational advantages which other programs either cannot offer or can offer only with great difficulty. A school has a greater claim on the time and loyalty of the student and his family. It makes more accessible to students participation in the liturgy and the sacraments, which are powerful forces for the development of personal sanctity and for the building of community. It provides a more favorable pedagogical and psychological environment for teaching Christian faith. With the Second Vatican Council we affirm our conviction that the Catholic school 'retains its immense importance in the circumstances of our times' and we recall the duty of Catholic parents 'to entrust their children to Catholic schools, when and where this is possible, to support such schools to the extent of their ability, and to work along with them for the welfare of their children.' (*Christian Education*, 8)

* * *

We are well aware of the problems which now face the Catholic school system in the United States. We also wish our position to be clear. For our part, as bishops, we reaffirm our conviction that Catholic schools which realize the threefold purpose of Christian education—to teach doctrine, to build community, and to serve—are the most effective means available to the Church for the education of children and young people who thus may 'grow into manhood according to the mature measure of Christ.' (*Christian Education*, 2; cf. Ephesians, 4:13) We call upon all members of the Catholic community to do everything in their power to maintain and strengthen Catholic schools which embrace the threefold purpose of Christian education.

The U.S. Catholic bishops made these statements

nearly twenty years ago in their pastoral letter, "To Teach As Jesus Did."[25] During the intervening years, a significant body of research added substantial evidence that Catholic schools as a group are exceptionally effective instruments in shaping the spiritual and academic growth of their students. For a Church committed to sharing its faith and its future with succeeding generations, Catholic schools provide a strong and perhaps indispensable source of continuity and renewal. There would appear to be a broad consensus, increasingly well documented by research, that Catholic schools make a substantial and unique contribution to the intellectual, civic and spiritual health of the Catholic community and the nation at large.

And yet, during the past twenty-five years there has been substantial contraction in the number of Catholic schools, and an even greater contraction in the number of students served by the remaining schools. In 1972, the year the pastoral was written, there were 10,829 Catholic elementary and secondary schools serving just over 4,000,000 students. In 1990, there are 8,719 schools serving 2,600,000 students. Since the pastoral was written, and "...all members of the Catholic community" were called upon by the bishops "...to do everything in their power to maintain and strengthen Catholic schools...", there has been a 19% decrease in the numbers of institutions, and a 38% decrease in the numbers of students in Catholic schools.

Some have suggested that this contraction is simply a reflection of the new Catholic school economics, increased costs driven by largely lay teaching staffs and constraints on income derived primarily from tuitions paid by families of modest means. But explanations based on economic analysis leave a number of fundamental questions unanswered.

How did an earlier and poorer American Catholic community build and support an extensive network of Catholic schools?

How are other religious groups, including evangelical Protestants whose aggregate wealth is considerably less than that of an increasingly affluent U.S. Catholic community, able to expand the numbers of their schools at the same time that Catholic schools are contracting? Since 1965, enrollment in non-Catholic religiously affiliated schools, of which Evangelical schools are the major share, has grown 149%.[26]

Given the wide-spread agreement that Catholic schools

are a gift to the Church and a gift to the nation, why are they an endangered species?

4. *A Suggested Answer*

While there is substantial agreement within the Catholic community about the effectiveness of Catholic schools, there is simultaneously a crisis of commitment. Within the Catholic community, some see schools as a burden, and some see schools as a service-for-a-fee, to be offered to those who want them and can pay for them. In the larger socio-political context, Catholic schools are regarded either as a threat or an irrelevance by many in the educational and political establishments. Although their numbers are not insignificant and their commitment is in many instances heroic, supporters of Catholic schools find it increasingly difficult to join forces, and many have decided that their efforts can be effective only on behalf of a particular school.

The dilemma of Catholic schools is a reflection of the central challenge facing American Catholicism, the call for cohesive and articulate leadership drawn from all sectors of the Catholic community, including the traditional canonical leadership of bishops, priests and religious, in collaboration with the emerging leadership of the laity . Leadership in the Church of the Twenty-First Century may necessarily include many voices from the choir and the pews as well as the pulpit, but the leadership challenge, increasingly complex, is to elicit cohesion, collaboration and harmony rather than anarchy, chaos and dissonance.

If the leadership question is central to the future of American Catholicism, it is immediately and critically important to the future of Catholic schooling in this country. It seems fair to suggest that, unless there is a substantial shift in commitment, the evolution of Catholic schools will be driven by Darwinian imperatives. Catholic schools of the twenty-first century could become a loose federation of independent institutions serving a primarily affluent clientele while honoring the memory of their founders' original religious roots, not unlike many of the oldest prep schools and universities. Although the Darwinian scenario might serve the needs of those who define the issue of Catholic schools solely in economic terms, many others would see it as a Faustian bargain.

In sum, the suggested answer to the fundamental question of why Catholic schools are an endangered species is linked to the challenge within the Catholic community to provide vision and leadership that transcends institutional and regional boundaries. This is a challenge that has not yet been met, but there are some encouraging signs:

- recent statements of support for Catholic schools from several state episcopal conferences, as well as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops;

- increasingly positive research from surprising sources like the Brookings Institution[27] and the Rand Corporation[28];

- a new and growing movement among Catholic educational leaders to work together to bring the evidence of Catholic school effectiveness to the attention of the larger Catholic and civic community.

A realistic appraisal of the current status of Catholic schools must acknowledge the presence of both darkness and light, but their future can still be shaped by the wisdom, courage and capacity for collaboration that the present leadership brings to its work. Some look at today's dim light and call it twilight, but others see it as dawn. In either case, this is a good time to light new fires.

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